

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

The South Carolina Department of Social Services (Human Services Division) conducted a limited qualitative review of Marion County DSS beginning April 7, 2003. The review consisted of case record reviews, staff interviews, client contacts, and external stakeholder interviews. In this review, the external stakeholders interviewed were foster parents, the Guardian ad Litem Program, Marion Drug & Alcohol, DJJ, Marion Medical Center and the Marion County Administrative Judge.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SAMPLE INFORMATION

Program under Review	Referrals Not Accepted As CPS Reports	CPS Invest.	CPS Treat. Active	CPS Treat. Closed	Foster Care – Active	Foster Care – Closed	FHL	MTS	Adoption
Case Population For Period Under Review	71	9	25	21	17	13	25	8	9
Cases Reviewed	5	3	4	3	5	2	5	1	3

This report is in 3 major sections: the Review Summary by Critical Decision Points, the General Findings section outlining strengths and issues that may require action, and the Measures and Outputs section that applies the review findings to the Agency's Child Welfare Outcome Measures Report that captures information off the CAPSS system as of 01/01/2003.

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

REVIEW SUMMARY BY CRITICAL DECISION POINTS

Intake:

Documentation supported appropriate decision making was occurring in the Intake process. Intake workers used probe questioning and made appropriate collateral contacts when warranted. Supervisory input and guidance was evident.

Investigation:

Appropriate response time was identified and immediate contact with the family, relatives and agency providers reflected good judgment and solid CW practice. Safety was evaluated and considered for all children in the home at initial contact.

We noted the county was effective in ensuring that Safety Plans were developed with the Families in instances where the children were not removed. The Safety Plans were completed with client or protectors input and signatures. The County made numerous home visits and/or collateral contacts throughout the investigation to ensure ongoing safety of the children. All investigative activities were well documented in the CAPSS system.

Case Decision:

In the cases reviewed, supervisory review and guidance in the decision making process was well documented in case records. Case decisions were supported by the evidence documented in the case files or the CAPSS system. The county was effective in making efforts to notify the parties involved in the investigation of the case decision. The case decision on average was made within 41 days.

Case Transfer/Transition to Treatment and Foster Care:

Staff interviews and case record documentation indicated the initial contact by foster care staff occurred generally within 8 days of the child's entry into foster care. In CPS Treatment cases, the initial contact with the family occurred on average 10 days after the case transfer.

Foster Care (Out-of-Home)

Assessment and Treatment Planning:

In the cases reviewed and interviews with staff, family assessment and case planning for Foster Care cases did not include input and involvement from the family in the majority of the cases. Plan were realistic and generally described specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in the behavior and specially addressed the medical, educational, or social needs for the individual child. Cases where Independent Living was a plan for the foster child (ren), specially tasks/goals for the child (ren) and/or service provider to prepare the child for life after foster care was well documented.

Service Delivery:

Based on case review, we found the county was effective in initiating services after placement. Regular contacts were documented for Foster Care

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

cases with ongoing safety assessed for the child (ren) in care. Most foster children had no placement changes while in care.

Interaction between the Agency and the Foster Care Review Board was documented on the computer system and in case files, and copies of the findings from those hearings were on file. Marion Foster Parents surveyed indicated they were notified of upcoming FCRB and Court hearings.

Documentation in the foster care cases indicated that clients were not involved in the development of their case plan. However, as stated previously, the plans were realistic and generally described specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in behavior and specifically addressed the medical, educational, or social needs for the individual child. The plans considered the specific needs of the foster child and the permanency of the child was always considered in service delivery.

There was a good use of Service Providers in the majority of the cases selected for Review. Marion County DSS did a good job of identifying and providing appropriate services for the children and parents. Documentation in the case files, stakeholder and staff interviews indicated there was communication between the County Office and the Service Providers. The County continually monitored treatment services through Supervisory staffing, reviewing the Treatment Plans and the agency's interaction with the Service Providers.

Closure:

Foster Care cases that were closed documented staffing or case evaluation activity that supported the decision to close. In the closed cases reviewed, the well being of the child and the desire to achieve some sort of permanency for the foster child was always considered. The documentation in the case files indicated parental and service providers input into the county's decision to close out foster care services. Cases were usually promptly closed on the computer system after the decision was made.

Court Activity Foster Care (Out-of-Home):

Interviews with DSS staff, foster parents, the Administrative Court Judge and the Marion County Guardian ad Litem Program were completed. The stakeholders and staff interviewed as well as the case files indicated no major area of concern in this area. All parties interviewed indicated they were notified of hearings in advance. Stakeholders felt the staff was caring and dedicated and did the best job possible with limited resources, funding and staff.

CPS (In-Home) Treatment

CPS Treatment:

Based on case review, we found that the county was effective in initiating services after the case decision. Regular contacts were documented for CPS Treatment cases with ongoing safety assessed for the child (ren) in the home. Assessments were very thorough. In CPS Treatment parental involvement planning was limited. The plans generally addressed the specific needs of the parents and identified appropriate and realistic goals that needed to be achieved but the plans were generally developed by the CW and given to the client to sign. There was evidence of mutual planning and good interaction with the Service Providers in most of the CPS Treatment cases reviewed. One

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

reviewer expressed concern over one case that had been open since 1996 (with the exception of 11 months) with the Treatment goals remaining essentially the same. The reviewer felt the case may need to take a new direction since the parent is unable or unwilling to achieve the goals/objectives on the current Treatment Plan.

Evaluation:

In the cases reviewed supervisory involvement and guidance was apparent in most cases. The reviewers noted that as a rule the Treatment cases were moving appropriately through the system and addressing the family's specific needs.

Closure:

Closed CPS Treatment cases documented activity that supported the decision to close treatment services to the family. In the cases reviewed, the input of parents and service providers was documented in the cases. Cases were promptly closed on the computer system after the decision to close treatment services was made.

Foster Home Licensing:

Recruitment Plan:

Marion County has a 2001/2002 Recruitment and Retention Plan for Foster and Adoptive Parents on file with the SCDSS. According to this document Marion DSS has identified the following needs:

- To increase the total foster parent population by 5 families with the additional capacity for 10 children within the next fiscal year.
- To increase the foster parent population by a minimum of 2 families who can serve medically fragile/special needs children
- To increase the foster parent population by a minimum of 2 families who can serve adolescents and prepare teens for Independent Living.
- To increase the foster parent population of white foster homes by a minimum of 1 family to serve white foster children.

To achieve these desired outcomes the County has developed an action plan, identified steps that will need to be taken and identified stakeholders to help achieve these goals.

Marion County DSS has ongoing retention methods in place. These include acknowledging special occasions of their foster parents (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.), sponsoring a foster parent appreciation dinner and increasing accelerated board payments for foster parents willing to care for teens and work with them on Independent Living Skills.

Initial Licenses:

Assessment summaries were and all inspections and background checks were properly completed.

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

License Renewal:

Renewal of Foster Home Licenses were being completed prior to the expiration of the previous license in all but 2 of the cases reviewed. In our case review, we noted appropriate completion of all records checks in the cases.

Ongoing Activities:

Based on the staff and Foster Parent interviews, regular quarterly contacts are taking place with the FHL worker. Foster Parents also felt the foster child's caseworker was also readily available if needed.

Reviewers had some area of concern regarding the consistency of what was entered into the CAPSS system and what was documented in the case file in several of the cases regarding the age/number of the children the home was licensed for. These numbers did not match.

MEASURES AND OUTPUTS

Outcome 1: Increase permanency in Foster Care (Safe and Sable Home for Every Child)

Measure	Source	County		State	
		#	%	#	%
Total Children in Care	CAPSS	63	100%	4973	100%
Children in care more than 12 months	CAPSS	28	44.44%	3119	62.52%
In care more than 12 months where permanency hearing has not been held	CAPSS	5	17.86%	523	16.82%

Summary: Marion DSS has the structure in place to enable achievement of this outcome. They have addressed this issue in their Self-Assessment. Among their goals is to continue concurrent planning to accomplish a permanent plan for each child, utilize foster parents as adoptive resources, to seek placements with relatives rather than using foster homes and ensure all TPR and PP Hearings occur timely.

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

Outcome 2: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Adoption

Measure	County		State	
	#	Months	#	Months
Average number of months in foster care until adoption is final	1	31.70	358	46.81

Summary: Marion DSS has identified the following ways to achieve this outcome:

- Have permanency planning hearings timely.
- Ensure staff have thorough family assessments and documentation to proceed with TPR.
- Increase the number of children placed in a permanent home within 18 months.

Outcome 3: Improve Child Well-Being

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and adolescents attending school and performing: passing grades, maintaining grade level, school readiness (1 st), truancy, suspensions/expulsions, literacy, diploma/GED, secondary education	In the cases reviewed where Foster Children were in school, we found that most were on grade level, and not exhibiting attendance or behavior problems.			
Number and percentage of children and adolescents who show physical and mental health is stable or improving (therapy, screenings)	In the cases reviewed, we found that all children identified with mental health or adjustment issues were actively receiving therapy or counseling.			
Number and percentage of children with substance abuse are stable or improving	In the cases reviewed, we found that no children were identified with substance abuse issues.			
Number and percentage of runaways	1	100%	107	100%
Number and percentage who become pregnant	From case file review and caseworker interviews, we noted one case of pregnancy.			
Number and percentage who are adjudicated for delinquency: once, more than once.	In the cases reviewed, we found no children currently involved with delinquency issues.			

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

Summary: Based on case reviews, children in foster care in Marion are receiving services to address any mental or medical issues.

Outcome 4: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Reunification Without Increasing Re-entry

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children who show physical and mental health stability and/or improvement	Based on our review Foster Care cases and caseworker interviews, all children were either receiving counseling or in a supportive placement which stabilized any physical or mental health conditions.			
Average number of family/relative visits per child month (parents, other relatives)	In the Foster Care cases where visitation was a part of the case plan, we noted frequent visitation occurring with family and/or relatives.			
Number of children who return to foster care after reunification within 12 months	0	0%	24	8.66%

Summary: Our case review indicated that visitation occurred on a regular and planned basis. Children in foster care in Marion are receiving services to address any mental health or medical issues. According to the data, Marion is very successful in preventing children returning to foster care after reunification within 12 months.

Outcome 5: Reduce Placements of Young Children in Group Homes or Institutions (Federal Requirement)

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children age 12 years and below placed in group homes or institutions	5	3.15%	2384	56.32%

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

Summary: Marion DSS is taking the age of the child into consideration when arranging placements, by considering the availability of individual foster homes first.

Outcome 6: Reduce/Prevent Abuse of Children in Foster Care

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of children in foster care with substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff person	0	0%	28	100%

Summary: Marion DSS has regular telephone and face-to-face contacts with foster parents by staff. Visits with foster children are also clearly documented as an ongoing assessment of the child's safety. In their Self-Assessment Marion County DSS states they will continue to monitor and assess placements and enhance foster parent training.

Outcome 7: Increase Stability of Placements and Other Aspects of Foster Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children in foster care with more than two placements	0	0%	694	13.96%

Summary: The County has been very successful in achieving this outcome. Of the cases reviewed only one case had a change in foster care placements.

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

Outcome 8: Increase Stability of Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children who change schools/ school systems:	Of the children in Foster Care who are attending school:			
Once	Of the cases selected for review, one had changed school once as the result of placement.			
More than once	Of the cases selected for review, none had changed school more than once as a result of placements.			
Percentage of cases with more than one change in foster care workers	Of the cases reviewed, several had more than one change in foster care caseworkers.			

Summary: The documentation in the files reviewed did not directly address changes in schools or school districts, but review staff were able to determine from dictation those changes in schools that were recorded.

Outcome 9: Reduce/Prevent Abuse and Neglect of Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of indicated cases of child abuse and/or neglect:	12	40.00%	523	38.37%

Summary: Marion DSS identified the following as ways to achieve this outcome:

- Raise public awareness of the impact of child abuse and neglect through available media outlets.
- Raise community awareness of the impact of child abuse and neglect by sharing information with educators, law enforcement professionals, health care providers, and other entities and individuals.

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

Outcome 10: Reduce/Prevent Recurrence of Child Abuse and Neglect

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of reunification	0	0%	24	10.00%

Summary: Reviewers noted that several cases did have prior CPS history, either of unfounded reports, active agency involvement, or not accepted at referrals. Their Self-Assessment lists the following strategies to achieve this outcome:

- Ensure CPS safety plans & treatment plans are adequate and appropriate.
- Identify specific underlying problems related to incidents of child abuse and neglect.
- Provide targeted, effective parenting information to parents involved with treatment services.
- To support parents who have difficulty carrying out their parenting responsibilities.

Outcome 11: Limit the Number of Abused and/or Neglected Children Entering Foster Care to Those Who are Truly Endangered in Their Home

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children court ordered into placement	49	77.78%	4011	80.66%
Number and percentage of children placed informally (with relatives)	5	7.94%	381	7.66%
Number and percentage of treatment cases closed with risk reduced and treatment goals achieved (i.e. parents' and children's physical/mental health and safety improved)	4	4.60%	297	6.06%

Summary: Marion DSS used Safety Plans to ensure children's safety while in their own homes or when placed with relatives. They did a good job of identifying service providers in the community to assist them in providing a safe and stable home for the child (ren).

Human Services Program Quality Review

Marion County

April 2003

Outcome 12: Minimize Intrusion upon the Lives of Families and Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and families when asked, indicated/feel that the agency intruded in their lives:	In the interviews conducted, all interviewees felt that while they would prefer no involvement with the agency they understood why the agency was involved in their lives.			
Where services are provided (community based	Interviews and case record reviews indicated the provision of services were usually available within the community but several providers had waiting lists for their services. Also transportation could be a problem in obtaining services not located in the community.			
How we deliver services (mutual planning)	In interviews and case record reviews, planning was occurring in CPS and Foster Care cases with service providers.			
When services are provided (convenient hours)	Case documentation indicated that it was possible to arrange convenient times for service to be provided.			
How clients were treated (respect and dignity)	Those interviewed reported that they were treated with respect.			

Summary: Marion DSS did as good job of identifying and providing appropriate services to their clients.

Human Services Program Quality Review
Marion County
April 2003

Outcome 13: Increase Supply of Foster Home Placement Slots

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of licensed foster homes	26	100%	1843	100%

Summary: In their Self-Assessment the county has listed identified ways to address this problem. These include recruitment of white foster homes and to increase community awareness by the Public Service Announcements throughout the community.

Outcome 14: Increase Number of Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of Adoptions finalized	1	0.14%	358	100%